

Eötvös Loránd University
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– Theses in doctoral dissertation –
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TOPOI IN CYBERPUNK

**The robotized man, the machine with a soul
and the cybernetted society**

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‘Topoi in Cyberpunk: The robotized man, the machine with a soul and the
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I. Abstract

The subject of my doctoral dissertation is *cyberpunk literature*. I chose this subject matter because *speculative fiction* is very effective in displaying exciting, strange worlds,¹ and science fiction, which is a genre of the above mentioned category, is known to produce a special, fictitious activity space by way of cognitive (diegetic) alienation. While reading, we can drive our senses into imaginary worlds, experience the ways of different behaviors, and in the meantime these hypothetic realities stimulate our imagination and broaden our horizons. Nevertheless, if we study the construction of these works, we can discover the tendencies of our own reality, especially those of the new, the changing and the future-oriented. (Chapter 1)

I agree with Wolfgang Iser, who claims that the function of fiction is the mediation between personality and reality, that fiction is not an antithesis to reality, but it is to let us know something about reality.² I believe that topical issues of the last forty years can be found in cyberpunk literature; however, they are featured in a so distant (extrapolated) manner that they do not only provide explanations for reality, but are great at foreseeing the potential future in a “what if...?” context. Therefore, they are still topical and worthy of a close look. Reality and fiction can be related: our contemporary science fiction explains our contemporary present as our present provides a context for our contemporary science fiction. Nevertheless, all this cannot be handled like a time segment taken out of context; we must be aware of the history of these tendencies and genres as well as the fact that each action is a reaction, and each change is an answer to the experiences in contact. (Chapter 2)

Our modern society is fundamentally determined by *late capitalism* (from an economical point of view), *liberal humanism* (ideologically) and *post-modernism* (culturally).³ While numerous tendencies and traditions of the modern age live on in the present, the changes of the last few decades draw up a worldwide (but not at all united or absolutely global) paradigm shift. Some of its characteristic features can be grasped by certain key notions. Postindustrial economy is accompanied by the central role of information and technology, urbanization, globalization, networking, dematerialization and virtuality,

¹ Its genres consist of magical realism, science fiction, fantasy, horror, dystopic literature etc.

² Iser 1980, 40–41.

³ Lásd HUTCHEON (1983), JAUSS (1997a), JAMESON (2010), McHale (1992)

consumption and media saturation. In the democratic setting of liberal humanism the role of identity and individualism expands; minorities and subcultures enlarge; universal notions are questioned; binary reasoning, which is based on contrast, is relieved by a more fluid thinking focusing on similarities and differences. These changes started in the 1960s and they are still taking place; they are parts of certain constructed narratives. In order to make up these, I used theories by social scientists and art historians such as Foucault, McLuhan, Baudrillard, Castells, Lyotard, Freud, Latour, Toffler, Deleuze and Guattari, Virilio etc. One of such narratives is the concept of the cybernetted society, which represents our labyrinthine digital, virtual connection. Cyberpunk, which carries the prefix ‘cyber’, often defines cyberspace and virtual reality. In my thesis, I am concerned with these literary paraspaces, featuring not only their ontological insecurity, but their literary structure. (Chapter 3)

I believe that in our postmodern world, a *posthuman revolution* is taking place, which exceeds the idol of humanity as seen in humanism, deconstructs and reinterprets the concept of man, reflects the results and limitations of liberal humanism, and looks further than the anthropocene age and earthly biosphere.⁴ The 1985 essay ‘*A Cyborg Manifesto*’ by Donna Haraway reads: “The dichotomies between mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine, public and private, nature and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized are all in question ideologically.”⁵ The works by Francesca Ferrando, Nick Bostrom and Alexander Chislenko were of great assistance to me in this subject.

Speaking of posthuman life forms, the “fixed, autonomous, authentic, coherent and universal” human existence can be exceeded by the mechanized man, who internalizes technology by becoming a cyborg.⁶ This typical cyberpunk topos comes in all shapes and sizes such as bodily modifications, uploaded minds, cloning or hibernation. Another popular one is the “machine with a soul” that is an artificial life form coming to consciousness, like some artificial intelligence⁷ or an android.⁸ Through the literary realization of these topoi we can see several potential ways of the posthuman existence. (Chapter 4)

I think we live in a cyberpunk world that has not yet been fully written in any book, not yet presented by any film or videogame, nevertheless, each work has something to say about it. Therefore, I regard cyberpunk as *cultural information* which stirs certain contemporary historical, social, political, economic, cultural and philosophical issues. All those works that deal with posthuman societies based on information technology are closely related not only to our present, but our future, as well. By drawing up such worlds

⁴ The notion of posthuman has become an umbrella-term, which contains the philosophical, cultural, critical posthumanism, transhumanism (extropianism, liberal and democratic transhumanism), feminist new materialism, antihumanism and metahumanism, see FERRANDO 2013.

⁵ HARAWAY 2005, 121.

⁶ HEFFERNAN 2003, 118.

⁷ I focus mostly on the transcendence of the artificial intelligence and the technological singularity.

⁸ I focus mostly on ethical questions regarding the android and the uncanny valley theory.

they highlight these tendencies, and make the readers shape their own opinions. And so an open and constructive debate may start, which is about more than the actual work, but enriches our world using it.

II. Antecedents and research methods

The first two chapters of this dissertation focus on the main notions that put cyberpunk into a theoretical context. The other two chapters illustrate and expand the previous lessons by textual analysis binding theory and practice.

The selected prosaic works were created in the 1980s and 1990s, in the first and second generation of cyberpunk. My considerations were the following:

1. written between 1980 and 1995
2. written in English
3. prosaic work
4. contains typical features of the cyberpunk
5. a worthy addition to the canon
6. focuses on at least one of the three topoi

The novels I've analyzed (by authors):

- Pat Cadigan: *Mindplayers* (1987)
- Pat Cadigan: *Synners* (1991)
- William Gibson: *Count Zero* (1986)
- William Gibson: *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988)
- William Gibson: *Neuromancer* (1984)
- Marge Piercy: *He, She and It* (1991)
- Melissa Scott: *Trouble and Her Friends* (1994)
- Neal Stephenson: *Snow Crash* (1992)
- Bruce Sterling: *Schismatrix* (1985)
- Walter Jon Williams: *Hardwired* (1986)

The short stories I've analyzed (by authors):

- Pat Cadigan: *Rock On* (1986)
- William Gibson: *Burning Chrome* (1982)
- William Gibson: *Johnny Mnemonic* (1981)

- John Shirley: *Freezone* (1985)
- John Shirley: *Wolves of the Plateau* (1989)
- Bruce Sterling: *Cicada Queen* (1983)
- Bruce Sterling: *Spider Rose* (1982)
- Bruce Sterling: *Sunken Gardens* (1984)
- Bruce Sterling: *Swarm* (1982)
- Bruce Sterling: *Twenty Evocations* (1984)
- James Tiptree: *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* (1973)

As for secondary literature I strove to select the relevant theories of arts history, social science, media science and literature, and I grouped them as follows:

- popular literature
- science fiction literature
- cyberpunk literature
- postmodern literature
- cybernetted society
- posthumanism
- cyborg
- artificial intelligence

III. Theses

1. Popular literature

Among the changes inducing the disciplines of *cultural studies*, the following are to be mentioned: globalization of the popular culture; cosmopolitanism; multiplication of group cultures and identity policies, in other words, the push of the cultural practices and products of the minorities; in addition, experiencing the differences of cultures, peripheries shifting to the centre. In order to research these, I needed to expand the selection of subject and methodology, to make empirical research, to use interdisciplinary approach and contextualizing analyses. It is no coincidence that cultural studies involve mainly *popular culture studies*.⁹

⁹ FODOR-KÁLAI 2018, 27.

Since the phenomena of the Western mass culture became a legitimate research subject, it was time to overrun the definite, categorical partition of elite and popular cultures (see the works by Umberto Eco). Cultural studies embedded into the academic system and discourse, and with time the research of micro communities, mass media and popular genre made a start in Hungary, too. Its popularity is still growing as well as its acceptance.

Due to the more and more intense interaction of high literature and low literature, the boundaries of these categories are being re-evaluated through the issues like '*high literature vs. low literature*', '*classical literature vs. experimental literature*', '*popular literature vs. peripheral literature*', '*entertaining, popular, pulp and genre literature*'.

At this point, we have to underline the *changeable nature of genre formation*. Genres are organizational notions to group literary works, and the act of organization is two-directional: it sets certain works off from others, while highlights sameness or similarities, therefore it connects. One of the considerations here is *formal resemblance*, another is *similarity in content*. In other words, a genre is the result of an abstract filtering. In addition, a set genre has two more dimensions: *historicity and genre standards*. The definition, the history and the standards of a genre are influenced by temporality, consequently the content and boundaries of a genre change dynamically, and what comes to being is a constructed narrative.

Science fiction is currently in a transitional period. On one hand, there are some, who do not consider it "serious" literature;¹⁰ on the other hand, speculative literature is prospering, and by getting institutionalized and getting more popular, its quality is improving. It can be questioned whether there is an objective quality contrast between high literature and low literature, as well as the qualifiers '*elite*' and '*mass*'. Inasmuch the history of literature is interpreted as a dialogue with conventions of genres, then classical and experimental literary works set in a certain time may truly be isolated; however, this categorization is exposed to a diachronic reevaluation. Popular literature and peripheral literature support the aspect of cultural consumption, and this position does not necessarily correlate with aesthetical value.

Any work in *genre literature* builds on the traditions, tools and topoi of a certain genre. Genres of *popular literature* (detective novels, adventure novels, romantic novels) were invisible in the eyes of the professional literary interpreters for a very long time, but all that is changing. At the same time the position of science fiction (which belongs to entertaining literature) is changing, too, as it loses generalizing and stigmatizing tags like "easy" or "pulp", and its remarkable works may gain an intercanonical position.

¹⁰ See BÁRÁNY 2011

2. Science fiction

In Chapter 1 (*Science fiction as a part of literature*) I examine the quality marks of the science fiction literature referring to scientific quality, imagination and society. I describe the *short* and *long models* of science fiction history, definitions of the various genres, genre features, as well as the position of this genre. While going through its history line, I regarded the following as inducers of its independence:

1. Consciously and thematically organized forums (where magazine editors and book publishers decided about which work to publish), which were integrated into the literary market.

2. Science fiction readers eventually formed a group that followed these forums, and there were authors who wrote intentionally for this group, even considered themselves writers of this community.

3. Prestigious and respectable authorities came to being (awards, high-quality publication opportunities, accolades, or persons whose opinions mattered, and who provided awards, reviews and analyses).

Taking a look at the history of the short model of science fiction history it is easy to spot the change in the dominance of *hard* and *soft science fiction*. In the 1950s and 1980s hard science fiction bloomed, of which editor Kathryn Cramer said: “A work of sf is hard sf if a relationship to and knowledge of science and technology is central to the work.”¹¹ There are several relations between soft science fiction and social science fiction. The latter focuses on the effects of scientific evolution on human beings, and soft science fiction, too, lays emphasis on social studies related elements (anthropology, sociology, psychology, political science, etc.), though in this trend stylistic experimentation is especially significant.¹² In light of these, *the pretense of scientific credibility* is the only common feature among the works in science fiction literature.

Another quality mark of science fiction is *imagination*. *Sense of wonder*, which comes to being while reading, is a feeling of admiration and realization whenever the range of “possibility” broadens: something we thought impossible suddenly becomes possible, and we face phenomena we could not imagine. Judit Maár defines ‘fantastic’ the following way: “despite every rationalizing attempt by the human mind, it can bump into inexplicable and irrational experiences, which, even temporarily, make impressions of the secret, inconceivable, therefore fantastic.”¹³ Tzvetan Todorov separates the following:

- ‘strange’, which can be explained by the laws of that particular world,
- ‘marvelous’, which raises the need for making up new laws,
- and ‘fantastic’; in this case ambiguity cannot be explained, so it is a temporary category.¹⁴

¹¹ CRAMER 2003, 187.

¹² Soft science fiction came to being in the 1960’s and 1970’s; see New Wave.

¹³ MAÁR 2001, 10.

¹⁴ TODOROV 2002, 39.

Darko Suvin defines science fiction as “literature of cognitive alienation”, just like Ferenc Döbörhegyi, who claims the same.¹⁵ That means there is always an “imaginary place” or “local illusion”, which “requires the *possibility* of an alien, covariant frame of reference and semantic field.” This may be realized partly due to the similarities between the created world and ours, which facilitates identification for the reader, at the same time the peculiarities of the diegetic world removes them. And so this foreign world becomes the subject of the recognition, to make it familiar by new ways. To make that possible, there are three abstraction tools in literature: *alternativity*, *extrapolation* and *speculation*.

Alternativity is a comparison strategy for understanding the world around us. It is a metaphoric process where the phenomena of our world prevail in an alternative reality. These feature mirror worlds, parallel universes or alternative past and present; in such cases the baseline or the starting point is our own world, which turns out to be only one of the possibilities.¹⁶

Extrapolation is a metonymic expanse of our experienced world. Instead of using a completely fictitious, alien world, it distorts what we have to make it into something that is a consequence of our own world. Linearity is not necessarily didactic, its spectrum may present anything from political, historical and social aspects to the changes of technology.¹⁷

Speculation is a take-off from our known world. This fictitious space is intentionally different, built by irregular laws. Despite the deliberate distance, this organic fiction does not need to break with all that is familiar; however, its core is a methodical otherness.¹⁸

While determining science fiction literature it may seem at first that definitions focusing on scientific qualities stress on *rationality*, and those focusing on fantasy stress on *irrationality*. Nevertheless, while pseudo-scientific hypotheses work with the semblance of credibility, and their rationality is due to logical reasoning and the storyline, fantasy has the same sort of rule: the fictitious world has to work consistently. Jenő Király introduced the notion of *motivated fantasy*, where the unlikely becomes likely:

- certain basic correlations of the reality are replaced by other basic correlations,
- the created world cannot be identified with the cultural reality concept, but the motivated fantasy “disturbs the identification of unlikely and impossible, presents the unlikely as a degree of the unlikely, structural otherness as merely functionality, fantasy as adventures, impossibility as unlikely”,
- it finds relations between the real world and fantasy, makes up an inherent logic, therefore shows unreal as real.¹⁹

¹⁵ SUVIN 1972, 44–45.; DÖBÖRHEGYI 2007, 105.

¹⁶ STOCKWELL 1996, 4–5.

¹⁷ STOCKWELL 1996, 5.

¹⁸ STOCKWELL 1996, 6.; MCHALE 2010, 4.

Suvin, too, highlights the need to match to cognitive logic, but adds that science fiction works always provide something new (*novum*), which is productive in this alienation; it always relates to the structure of the created world, it has an *organizational power* as for the plot.²⁰

Science fiction is going through a fragmentation that is getting quicker and quicker. Most of the new subgenres can be separated by their content, organised by characteristic topoi (like time travelling, space western, robot stories).

3. Cyberpunk

Cyberpunk started to become an independent genre when it became a *subgenre in science fiction literature* in the 1980s. In the works of the first-generation sci-fi writers or the Movement (e.g. Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Pat Cadigan, John Shirley, Lewis Shiner, Rudy Rucker) a typical set of topoi came to being reflecting the characteristic features of the era: late Capitalism, consummate and information technology, web-based globalization, technological innovations (first and foremost computers and cyborgization), the fall of ideas, the strengthening subcultures and the media, the interaction of canons, etc. The best-known, prototypical work was *Neuromancer* by William Gibson in 1984. Due to its immense popularity, cyberpunk with its hybrid subjects and typical styles went on to the mainstream culture, and other media (such as videogames, graphic novels, digital arts, music, fashion). Shiner claimed: “*Neuromancer* was not just an isolated phenomenon, because Gibson was part of a perceived group of writers, critics had a hook to work with. Bruce Sterling, Rudy Rucker, John Shirley and I became a ‘movement’. Sterling reinforced this notion, declaring that the “old, stale futures” of science fiction were dead. [...] But by 1987, cyberpunk had become a cliché. Other writers had turned the form into formula. [...] These changes led a number of us to declare the movement dead. For us, cyberpunk in its new incarnation had turned technology into an end in itself and lost its original impulse. Ironically, as the term cyberpunk was losing its meaning for us, it was escaping, virus-like, into the mainstream, where it continues to thrive.”²¹

We can find many arguments for and counterarguments against the Movement as a writing group, besides, their personal accounts show it differently than the historical research or analyses. For example, the group of cyberpunk writers was broader than the Movement, see *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson (1992), *Vurt* by Jeff Noon (1993), *Trouble and her Friends* by Melissa Scott (1994), *Cyberia* by Douglas Rushkoff (1994), *Permutation City* by Greg Egan (1994). In addition, it is difficult to disjoin the “first” and “second” generations.²² The internet and the worldwide web made a real change. A huge proportion of cyberfantasies had only been dreams; the new global computerized web system, however, created a real

¹⁹ KIRÁLY 1972, 517.

²⁰ SUVIN 1972, 47.

²¹ SHINER 1991b

base for these, which made the mist around literary cyberspaces and virtual realities disappear or transform. These works are often listed as *postcyberpunk*. The subgenre has been divided on (e.g. cyberfiction), and several derivatives came to being: steampunk, nanopunk, biopunk, ecopunk, stonepunk, elfpunk, mythpunk.

A popular definition of cyberpunk is: “*high-tech – low life*”. On one hand, in the fictitious world of these works information technology is always present one way or another, plus a cyber culture (high-tech, as referred to by the prefix *cyber*).²³ On the other hand, society is struck by low living standards or a significant crisis of values (low life). *Punk* as a postfix has a broader meaning:

1. Obvious and implicit intertextual references to punk and rock music, and their subcultures.
2. Subcultures appear in diegetic worlds. They may be associated or identified with certain youth subcultures of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, their main characteristics are *resistance* and *periphery*.
3. Low life, which means that society in a diegetic world has low living standards, and lives a crisis of moral values (a dystopian feature).

Cyberpunk may be related to *postmodern* in many ways. I made a distinction between postmodern era, postmodern cultural dominant and postmodern literature. Cyberpunk is a result of the postmodern era, therefore, implicitly it reflects several features and tendencies of the postmodern cultural dominance. It was born in parallel, and these two shared a lot, nevertheless, their canons did not merge. Common properties are ontological turn, change of genres and thematic hybridization. In Chapter 2 I mention subjects like dystopia, subculture, recycling of contexts and the organic/inorganic joining. At the end of Chapter 2, I listed all features of the subgenre:

- Cyberpunk is a subgenre of science fiction.
- Two of its organizational elements are science and novelty in fantasy.
- A thematical interest, one variety of which is literary cyberpunk.
- The *differentia specifica* of cyberpunk is defined by its topos system, which is quite similar to the postmodern attitudes (e.g. the symbiosis of high and low mass culture, thematic hybridization).
- Intersections: 1. cybertechnology, virtuality and network (cyber); 2. resistance and periphery (punk); 3. urban subcultures (fragmented urban living and thematic hybridization); 4. posthuman image of man. If these subjects are merged in one particular work, it is likely to belong to cyberpunk.

²² Time-wise this means the eighties and the nineties.

²³ Further media technologies and telecommunication systems could be listed under the umbrella-term of *cyber*.

- The fictitious world of these works are typically organized by extrapolation (instead of alternativity and speculation), which results in numerous parallels with our own era. Consequently, it is age specific.
- Most of the worlds are on a higher level of technology than ours, which feels futuristic. However, future settings are not mandatory.
- It is general that high level of technology is paired with a crisis of values in these fictitious worlds. This crisis is present both on personal and social level, therefore, cyberpunk features dystopian elements.

4. Cybernetted society

Cybernetted society has been coming up since the 1970s, and it presumes a new kind of social organization economically, politically and geographically. This paradigm shift is followed by a general disorientation – a typical feature of the postmodern era – along with a crisis of value and self-definition, distrust towards events and major principles, and future shock by many.

Another great example for the change of earlier hierarchies to *net-based structures* is the appearance of flowing spaces (i.e. a quickening paced flow of information, notions, capital and goods). In the 1980s and 1990s, as television, telephone and computer became widespread, the roles of cool and hot media were fundamentally changed, and this had an effect on almost every segment of identity and group consciousness. Other notions to be mentioned are: information, dematerialization, interaction, dystopia, cyberspace, relativity, media saturation, alienation, sharing, memory, multiplication, fluidity, onto-tech ambivalence, fragmentation, simulation, speed, technicized world, network, new image of space and time, identity, retribalisation, illusion, urban nomad existence, immersivity, virtuality, etc.²⁴

It is important to underline that cyberspace as we know it is a reference frame. In this information environment – that is transmitted by technical mediation and built on complex abstraction levels – the user has access to and can use digital information. It may be considered as a metamedium characterized by the following:

- network based complexity
- lack of centre (which does not mean the lack of complex hierarchies)
- interactivity (two-way communication, multidirectional flow of information)
- participativity (that is it requires active participation from the user)

Virtual reality is a broader idea which may mean an entity or space, that

1. is not present physically in its essence or effect,

²⁴ Here we could mention the typical cyberpunk hero, the hacker (like Henry Dorsett Case in *Neuromancer* or Hiro in *Snow Crash*).

2. is presented plausibly, yet not real,
3. exists only in a computing environment

Virtual reality has something in common with similar notions like immersive multimedia, augmented (expanded) reality and computer simulated reality. All these technologies depend on certain instruments and are technically determined. Virtual reality and cyberspace have an overlapped segment, and there are three features: 1. *interaction*, 2. *telepresence*, 3. *immersivity*.

Our own concept about cyberspace is written into the lingual representation. Computer generated, two-dimensional graphics can show bound information, which turns into a three-dimensional conceptual space in our mind, where it is easy to teleport from one colony to another. During this transformation, semantic constructions coded into metaphors can connect two connotations.

All the cyberspaces and virtual realities set in cyberpunk works are *abstract literary constructions*, which are formed by the organic, creating power of language and imagination – only for that particular book, through the medium of the book. Through the phonetic writing the experiences and perception a translated form is created, and through the description a specific system of metaphors is activated. Each one of these (as pointed out by Sameul Delany) is a *paraspaces*.²⁵ The analyzed literary cyberspaces are built on different conceptual bases, and work by different mechanisms (e.g. Metaversum, Matrix, Net).

5. Posthuman

Most of the posthuman trends agree with the *discipline of technogenesis*, which says that humans have always been embedded to technology. Theoretical preludes support the view which claims that our tools are an expanse of our senses.²⁶ However, this is not a one-way condition: there is a constant two-way influence between man and machine. In the 1949 work *Question Concerning Technology*, Martin Heidegger highlighted that technology is *discovery* (Entbergen): it defines how we see and evaluate the world, and this has an effect on the ways we discover the world, which has a feedback on technology itself.²⁷ Therefore, our society is a *technosociety*, where the relationship of technology and human is being constructed in a constant change.

Alexander Chislenko believes that if we regard the world as an evolution arena of different systems, then each functioning system can keep their competitiveness by three features, that is if they are 1. complex enough, 2. at the same time convergent, 3. and able to adapt (complexity, integration, liquidity).²⁸

²⁵ Quoted by BUKATMAN 2001, 12–13.

²⁶ “In the mechanical era we had extended our bodies into space. Nowadays, after more than a century of electrical technology, we have actually extended our central nervous system into a global embrace which abolishes space and time.” MCLUHAN 2003, 5.

²⁷ HEIDEGGER 1994, 116.

²⁸ CHISLENKO 1997

The first two optimize the system, the third facilitates change and growth. As long as these work, any sort of modification is permissible in the system.

In this dissertation, concerning the posthuman scale, I bring up several examples for the literary appearances of cyborgization, for instance *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* (1974); *Schismatrix* (1985); *The Wolves of the Plateau* (1989). One of these is the issue of *mind uploading*. Its propagators think that 1. the brain is a material organism of mind; mind is the function of the highest order of the human brain; this function is defined by its environment, and reflects the outer reality, while it makes up a complex system of neural networks (these organizational patterns can be reproduced or produced in another way). 2. They stress not the duality of body and mind, but the immateriality of mind and its similarity to information, which makes it similar to data files or computing software. Hans Moravec, who is a futurist, writes about possibilities of robotics, artificial intelligence and mind uploading in his books (*Mind Children*, 1999; *Robot: Mere Machines to Transcendent Mind*, 1999). He says that mind uploading is a hypothetical process: a human brain can be scanned (with nanotechnical instruments), biological and computing models can be synchronized, and if the uploading is complete, the subject can be joined to another body. As memory can be coded to digital information, it is storable, copiable and downloadable. In other words, a body can die, but its mind can live on as software.

While discussing the topos of machine with a soul, I will use numerous social and cultural theory references, but for now, I would like to mention only the *uncanny valley theory*. The novel *He, She and It* by Marge Piercy is about an android's awakening, development and fight for freedom. The android is a boundary term, a reference to a secret on the borderline of living and not living, human and not human, in an uncharted region.

Certain researches have already been carried out in the field of human–robot interaction (HRI),²⁹ in which human reactions to androids are analyzed. Physically speaking modern androids are very much like humans, and due to their programming, they can imitate human behavior, like making up a dialogue, but do not have consciousness. It is a proven fact, that a machine which is too human-like make us feel embarrassed. This is the base of the Uncanny Valley theory. The German term, *unheimlich* is very similar, which means *uncanny*, *eerie* or *creepy*, and involves a familiar thing turning into its own reverse.³⁰

A robotics professor, Masahiro Mori made up his theory about our relationship to androids in the 1970s. He studied the various phases of anthropomorphism, and entwined likeness with a sympathygraph. The starting point was an industrial robot, the ending point was a healthy human being. This graph showed that our reactions to humanlike robots are positive – up to a certain point. That means that a character who is 80% real is easier for us to accept, than another one who is 95% real (no matter if

²⁹ MACDORMAN–ENTEZARI 2015

³⁰ FREUD 1998, 65–81.

this is a cartoon character, a dummy or a robot). This is the point where human reactions get different, and liking decreases. Authenticity is fascinating, but the knowledge that it is artificial, makes us dislike it. The reason for distrust is the simple intuition claiming that what we see goes against our own preconceptions. This bad feeling is inexplicable at first, it is based on alien feelings and repugnance. Nevertheless, its “likeability” may be increased if the android has a sex and a name, or if it has humor and creativity. Its smile, even it is a programmed response, it makes us happy. We believe, its smile is honest as we endow it with human character due to its human appearance. Certain researchers say that anthropomorphism is about the adaptation and survival of the android.³¹ The above mentioned ambivalences are easily recognized in Yod, the protagonist by Piercy.

Despite the diversity of cyberpunk textual worlds, it is obvious that the posthuman character is there in almost every one of them, becoming an organizational element of the story, a novelty.

IV. Aims

When I started to do my research on cyberpunk literature, I realized that out of the selected works only the *Neuromancer* trilogy, *Snow Crash* and *Burning Chrome* had already been translated to Hungarian. I found two issues of Prae magazine very useful (1999/1 *Sci-fi*; 2001/1 *Cyberpunk*),³² as well as a collection, *Alien Universes: essays on fantasy, science fiction and cyberpunk*, and the works by Györgyi Rétfavli, Szilárd Sánta and István Zoltán Szabó. However, having read all those, it was extremely difficult to find anything else. I feel that science fiction (and cyberpunk) ought to be represented more in the Hungarian literature and the market. I took up this task proudly in order to make up for it by choosing a subject like that and translating some English materials. In addition, there is a literary library that was very serviceable presenting cyberpunk literature and helping us go on.

In my dissertation I tried to take the discourse about genres, canons, popular literature, postmodern and posthuman eras to a higher level, adding my own views, as well. I trust that revising the relevant issues of literature, culture and social studies I could add something to the history of literature and culture, plus facilitate a broader dialogue about present and past.

³¹ ZŁOTOWSKI–PROUDFOOT–BARTNECK 2013, 2.

³² They contain the writings of Péter H. Nagy, Tamás Béneyei, Brian McHale, Timothy Leary, Veronica Hollinger, Scott Bukatman, Brooks Landon, Eric S. Rabkin, Ruth Curl, Karen Cadora and Szilvia Sz. Molnár.

V. Own publications and presentations relevant to the topic

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I've shared my gained knowledge of cyberpunk with the broader audience in lectures and presentations as well. In 2015 I gave a series of lectures as part of Pesti Bölcsész Akadémia, in 2016-ban I gave a lecture at KPVK Illyés Gyula Szakkollégium, and I held a presentation at the ELTE Művészetelméleti és Médiakutatási Intézetének Intézeti Éjszakája.

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